DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 395 EA 002 268

By-Mayer, Martin

The Governing Board.

Pub Date 69

Note-28p.; Part I in THE TEACHERS STRIKE, NEW YORK, 1968

Available from-Harper and Row, Publishers, 49 East 33rd Street, New York, New York 10016 (Complete document 122 pages, $3.95)

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.50

Descriptors-Administrator Selection, *Board of Education Policy, Civil Rights, Collective Negotiation, *Community Control, Community Leaders, Court Litigation, *Decentralization, Elementary Schools, *Governing Boards, Junior High Schools, Organizations (Groups), *School Administration, School Boycotts, School Districts, Teacher Associations, Teacher Militancy, Teacher Strikes

Identifiers-New York City Board of Education, Ocean Hill Brownsville, UFT, United Federation of Teachers

In late spring of 1967, the New York City Board of Education recognized an experimental school district, comprised of two junior high schools and six elementary schools, in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area of New York City. The prime impetus for this experiment in community involvement in decentralized school administration stemmed from a coalition of parents residing in the community and teachers belonging to the United Federation of Teachers. Representatives of this coalition were members of the district's initial planning council, and later comprised the majority of the members of the district's Governing Board. This experiment immediately faced large obstacles and consequent frustrations stemming from at least three sources: (1) Intercoalition dissension, heightened by the city-wide teachers strike of 1967, (2) the city Board of Education's refusal to allocate authority to the local Governing Board, and (3) widespread dissension and insecurity throughout the total staff of the school district. These factors, coupled with other disruptions, accented the position of those members of the Governing Board who felt the need to "force a confrontation." (JH)

ED029395

THE TEACHERS STRIKE

NEW YORK, 1968

by Martin Mayer

$3.95

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS
1817
NEW YORK, EVANSTON, AND LONDON

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

EA 002 268

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

1—5

Design by Sidney Feinberg
Set in Linotype Caledonia
Composed, printed and bound by American Book–Stratford Press, Inc.
HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, INCORPORATED

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED
BY Mr. Robert Sachs, Harper and Row
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING
UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF
EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE
THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF
THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

THE TEACHERS STRIKE: NEW YORK, 1968. *Copyright © 1969 by Martin Prager Mayer. Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 49 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016. Published simultaneously in Canada by Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, Toronto.*

FIRST EDITION

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 76–76801

697071727387654321

✓
✓

6/7/8'

CONTENTS

Dramatis Personae, 11
Introduction, 15

PART I. THE GOVERNING BOARD, 21

The Planning Council Becomes a Governing Board and Hires Principals, 25

The Teachers Strike the City for Their Own Reasons, and Ocean Hill Hates Them for It, 30

Frustration Overwhelms the District and Radicalizes Its Governing Board, 33

PART II. THE CONFRONTATION, 39

The Governing Board Dismisses the Wrong Teachers for the Wrong Reasons, 42

The Union Strikes the Project, 50

The Board of Education and Ted Kheel Try to Settle the Strike Against the District, 53

The Lindsay Appointees to the Board of Education Take Charge of the Problem, 59

The Storm Gathers over the City, 63

9/10

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DR. JAMES E. ALLEN: New York State Commissioner of Education. Reluctant to involve himself or his high office in the catastrophe of the teacher strikes, he was incessantly summoned to the city by a paralyzed Board of Education and a terrified Mayor. After a number of false starts he worked out the settlement that ended the third strike.

DR. KENNETH CLARK: Professor of psychology at City University, only Negro member of the Board of Regents, and president of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center. A voice for Ocean Hill in the ear of Commissioner Allen and for practicality in the ear of Rhody McCoy, he saw his efforts tragically frustrated by a combination of bad information from his friends and brute force from his enemies.

JOHN M. DOAR: Former chief of the civil rights section of the Justice Department, now president of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development Corporation. A newcomer to the city, innocent of its complexities, he was appointed to the Board of Education during the second teacher strike and elected its president during the third teacher strike. He opposed the settlements which ended both strikes, on the ground that

neither promoted voluntary compliance and a necessary peace in Ocean Hill.

DR. BERNARD DONOVAN: Superintendent of Schools. More of a politician, perhaps, than anyone else involved in this story, and much more knowledgeable about the school system, he was in the middle of every dispute, surrounded by men of principle who were not informed enough or sophisticated enough to see where their principles were leading them.

REV. MILTON GALAMISON: Minister and leader of the school boycotts of 1963–64. Appointed to the Board of Education in July, he assured its members during August that Ocean Hill was ready to settle with the union—and demonstrated his confidence in the correctness of that opinion by taking credit for the contract which settled the first strike and drove Ocean Hill to paroxysms of rage.

MAYOR JOHN V. LINDSAY: Caught in a tangle of public image, self image, naïveté and past misjudgments, he found himself playing host to a great civic disaster which acted itself out before him while he agonized over his surprising inability to control—or even to influence—the course of events.

RHODY A. MCCOY: New York City schoolman of eighteen years' experience, resident of suburban Roosevelt, and unit adminstrator of the Ocean Hill–Brownsville Demonstration Project. Committed to a range of educational innovation in the project's classrooms, he made a favorable impression on all visitors. From May through December he was the only person who met regularly with all the disputants —the members of his governing board, the officers of the union and the Board of Education. Confusion followed wherever he went, as the fog follows the tide.

REV. C. HERBERT OLIVER: Minister and chairman of the governing board of the Ocean Hill project. Like Mr. Doar

he was a newcomer to the city, with a reputation derived from the civil rights movement: he had been part of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He always wanted a fight, even when others didn't; and he opposed every suggested compromise.

FATHER JOHN POWIS: Worker priest and author of revolutionary proclamations. As founder of the "People's Board of Education," which preceded the demonstration project, he became one of that body's most influential and aggressive members. The first Ford grants to the project were awarded through his church. His planned indiscretions heralded the confrontation which led to the school strikes.

MAX J. RUBIN: Lawyer, member of the State Board of Regents and former president of the Board of Education. He was sent by his fellow Regents to explore the teachers' union's real demands in the third strike, introduced Commissioner Allen to union president Albert Shanker, and ultimately invented the idea which Allen turned into a viable settlement.

ALBERT SHANKER: Former junior high school math teacher, president of the United Federation of Teachers. A product of the Socialist wing of the teachers' union, and a civil rights activist, he was goaded into violent reaction by an injustice to some of his members working in Ocean Hill and by his utter distrust of the Mayor and the Board of Education. In person and in print, he had long advocated a partnership between union teachers and Negro parents as the only hope for success in the struggle to improve urban education; now he led a series of strikes which destroyed any chance of such a partnership.

ASSEMBLYMAN SAMUEL D. WRIGHT: Lawyer and Ocean Hill resident, who represents that district and its neighbors in the state assembly. Chairman of the original planning

group which set up the demonstration project and member of the governing board, he broke with Rev. Oliver and McCoy over their refusal to accept arbitration of their original dispute with the teachers' union, and called for new elections for the governing board.

INTRODUCTION

The New York teachers' strike of 1968 seems to me the worst disaster my native city has experienced in my lifetime—comparable in its economic impact to an earthquake that would destroy Manhattan below Chambers Street, much worse in its social effect than a major race riot. Worst of all, the strike will very probably reduce to the condition of a Boston or an Alabama, or some mixture of the two, a school system that was wretchedly ill-organized and weakly led but relatively alert intellectually and by no means so completely ineffective as it has become fashionable to say—and that was almost the only real hope the city could offer for the future of tens of thousands of Negro and Puerto Rican children.

It is always in the interests of those in authority to say that wars and mine disasters and such are inevitable. The belief underlying this report is that what happened in New York in the fall of 1968 was *not* inevitable, and that those who are saying that it was—especially those in the great foundations, in the universities and in the Mayor's office—are much more to be blamed for what happened than are any of the partici-

pants. Great wealth, academic position and political leadership carry responsibilities which were not met. At no point in the history that will be described on the succeeding pages did these forces demonstrate any understanding of what was happening in terms other than their own preconceptions, and at no point did they exert the authority, leadership or even influence which their status and social role obliged them to exert.

As an attempt at history, the following narrative concentrates on events and their immediate context; and a certain amount of background should be, as the lawyers say, stipulated from the start:

1. During the course of political reform in the 1930s, control of the New York City school system was narrowly concentrated in a central office. In the 1950s and early 1960s the machinery grew too complicated and too rigid for its purposes, and the system became increasingly unresponsive (in substance if not in public statement) to both the teachers in the classrooms and the parents whose children were in the schools. The teachers through trade-union organization were able to establish countervailing force; the parents were not. From 1961, when the state legislature mandated "revitalization" of the local boards, which had been allowed to atrophy since the 1930s, there has been a political drive toward "decentralization" of the school system, to make the schools accountable to "the community." As chairman of a local school board, incidentally, and as a writer for various publications, I was myself among the leaders of this drive. In the summer and fall of 1967 formal decentralization proposals were developed by an Advisory Committee to the Mayor, chaired by McGeorge Bundy of the Ford Foundation, for consideration by the state legislature in the spring of 1968. No representative of the teachers or the school supervisors,

Puerto Ricans among New York school administrators is almost invisible except at the lowest rank, that of assistant principal.

4. Ocean Hill is a border area between the slum districts of Brownsville and Bedford-Stuyvesant, some miles out from downtown Brooklyn. Less than a fifth of its adult population was born in New York City; less than a third completed high school; only two-fifths have lived in the area as long as five years; more than half the households subsist on less than $5,000 a year; about 70 percent are Negro, about 25 percent are Puerto Rican. Though there are some blocks of pleasant owner-occupied private houses, most people live in deteriorating rooming houses and tenements, and much of the area's housing is simply being abandoned by its owners. All the well-known social problems are present. It is a highly discouraging place in which to live and to bring up one's children.

18/19/20

the trade-union movement or the organized parent movement, was appointed to the committee.

2. In the middle 1960s the proportion of Negro and Puerto Rican children in the New York schools neared and then passed 50 percent. The proportion of Negro and Puerto Rican population in the city as a whole, however, is only about 27 percent, and the proportion of voters who are Negro or Puerto Rican is considerably less than 20 percent. New York ranks thirteenth among the nation's fifteen largest cities in the proportion of its population which is nonwhite. Within the schools the Negro and Puerto Rican children are doing substantially less well than mainland white children: at age twelve the gap between average white and average nonwhite accomplishment (excluding Orientals, who do fine) is more than two years as measured by standardized tests. It is psychologically very difficult for parents not to blame the schools; and almost equally difficult for people in the schools, who believe they are doing the best they can (and who know that their results are if anything a little better than the results in other cities), not to feel a degree of complacency in the face of failure by most of their students.

3. Most New York City schoolteachers are recruited from the city colleges, which until recently have admitted only students in the higher ranks of the city's high schools. Examinations beyond those required by the state have been imposed for a New York City teaching license, and promotion has been possible only through an elaborate system of internal examinations. Much but not all of this is mandated by state law. The proportion of Negroes and Puerto Ricans among full-time students at the city colleges has been until recently something like 3 percent; the proportion among the city's teachers is under 10 percent (by contrast with figures of 30 percent and more in other large cities, up to 80 percent in Washington, D.C.); and the proportion of Negroes and

Puerto Ricans among New York school administrators is almost invisible except at the lowest rank, that of assistant principal.

4. Ocean Hill is a border area between the slum districts of Brownsville and Bedford-Stuyvesant, some miles out from downtown Brooklyn. Less than a fifth of its adult population was born in New York City; less than a third completed high school; only two-fifths have lived in the area as long as five years; more than half the households subsist on less than $5,000 a year; about 70 percent are Negro, about 25 percent are Puerto Rican. Though there are some blocks of pleasant owner-occupied private houses, most people live in deteriorating rooming houses and tenements, and much of the area's housing is simply being abandoned by its owners. All the well-known social problems are present. It is a highly discouraging place in which to live and to bring up one's children.

18/19/20

PART I

THE GOVERNING BOARD

THE POSSIBILITY OF USING the Ocean Hill–Brownsville area to demonstrate the values of community involvement in school administration was first brought to the attention of the Ford Foundation by the United Federation of Teachers. Since 1966 the union had been running a project in teacher-parent joint action—picketings and other demonstrations—which had secured the removal of an unwanted principal at J-178 (since closed as a junior high school) and had won some special services for that school and for one of the elementary schools that fed into it. The leader of these joint ventures was Mrs. Sandra Feldman, a young teacher, union field representative and civil rights worker who had been among the organizers of East River CORE, dumping garbage on the Triborough Bridge, etc. These were extremely troubled schools with limited resources, and Mrs. Feldman was in and out of them, trying to make herself useful, through 1966 and 1967.

Meanwhile, a group of social workers and parents affiliated with Brooklyn CORE and with the emerging Council Against Poverty, and led mostly by a lean and hungry worker priest,

EA 002 268

Father John Powis of the Church of Our Lady of Presentation, had formed an unofficial "People's Board of Education" for the Ocean Hill area. Linked by their shared dislike of the Board of Education, and by their common roots in the civil rights movement, the union-sponsored marching society and the people's board joined forces in early 1967 to plan the liberation of the schools of the area from the heavy hand of the city-wide Board of Education.

It was known from the beginning that the two groups had different objectives. The people's board was interested in "community control," and the union was interested in the expansion of its More Effective Schools program, by which very substantial extra sums of money (about $600 additional per child) are invested in elementary schools to lower class size and to provide a wide range of special services. MES is extremely popular with the communities where it has been tried, however, so there was no necessary conflict between the participants in what came to be called "the planning council."

In the late spring of 1967 this planning group was recognized by the Board of Education and by the Ford Foundation, which in July put up $44,000 to pay the costs of setting up an experimental district to include the two junior high schools in the area and the five (later six) elementary schools which fed them. Any euphoria which may have been occasioned by the idea of Ford money, however, was greatly reduced at a meeting in early July with Superintendent of Schools Bernard Donovan, who informed the council that there would be no extra money whatever from the school system—and probably not much from Ford—to provide additional services for the experiment. Dr. Donovan told the group, in effect, that anybody could run better schools if he had a lot more money, and that the purpose of the experiment in community involvement was to find out whether its

advocates could run better schools on the same money. This statement was, of course, disappointing to all, but it made more sense to the people's board representatives than it did to the teachers.

The people's board representatives went into the summer months determined to have their project operative in the fall. They met steadily through the month of July, often with outside groups—from Ford, Brooklyn College, Yeshiva University, the Mayor's office and the Board of Education—in sessions which did not always include the teacher delegates. Among the outsiders at some of the sessions was an old friend of Father Powis', Herman Ferguson, who had recently denounced for "educational genocide" the MES school where he was employed, and who had been indicted (he was later convicted) for conspiracy to murder NAACP leader Roy Wilkins and Urban League director Whitney Young. In the absence of any systematic efforts at guidance by the Ford Foundation or the Board of Education (where the man charged with maintaining liaison with Ocean Hill took his summer vacation in July), the parent members of the planning council turned increasingly to Father Powis and to Ferguson, who was capable, forceful and extremely hostile to the union. The teacher delegates began to feel uncomfortable at meetings.

As its first step, by arrangement with Ford, the planning council hired a future unit administrator. Several candidates were interviewed by parent representatives and community leaders at sessions to which the teacher delegates were not invited, and the interviewers selected Rhody A. McCoy, a compact, thoughtful, impressive schoolman of eighteen years' experience in New York, acting principal of a school for seriously disturbed boys on the West Side of Manhattan. McCoy was also introduced by Father Powis, who had got his name from Edythe Gaines, then principal of Joan of Arc

Junior High School near McCoy's school, who knew him from district meetings and from the meetings of a new association of Negro school supervisors.

The teacher representatives on the planning council knew nothing against (or for) McCoy, but they were irked at the procedure and its speed, and a few of them thought there ought to be more than one name proposed to the full panel. Rather frivolously, on the grounds that he was somebody everyone knew, one of the teacher representatives nominated Jack Bloomfield, principal of J-271, one of the district's two junior highs. Some of the parents unquestionably felt that the teachers—authority figures in their lives at all times—were seeking to take the project away from them; and in quiet moments on Ocean Hill the reverberations of the Bloomfield nomination can still be heard. McCoy's name was quickly approved by the planning council.

Among McCoy's first acts as administrator was to authorize checks for sums of $39 to $100 for seventeen mothers of children in the district's schools, most of whom had announced that they were going to be candidates for the parent positions on whatever local board of education was set up as the result of the summer's work. These first payments were made to them as "election consultants." Some weeks after the election, in which seven of the seventeen were declared winners, the category for compensation to the lucky seven was changed to "parent representative." No public announcement was ever made that the parent representatives had been placed on the payroll, and Ford was never informed that the orginial proposal, which provided payments to board members only for attendance at training sessions, had been amended in this manner.

Payments declined as the Ford grant ran lower, rose briefly after Ford added another $15,000 in the fall, then declined again. The total up to February 1968, when the payments

stopped, ran to about a quarter of the $59,000 in the two Ford grants. The governing board's public statements became much more radical when these subventions ceased; and in the report of the personnel committee which was the first gun in the war with the teachers' union, a paragraph attacking Ford directly preceded the call for the dismissal of nineteen of the unit's teachers and administrators.

In general, though there is no reason to believe that financial pressure was ever applied to the members of this governing board—and though there is every reason to hope that in a decentralized school system board members will be officially paid for their time as part of a published budget—"community control" is a dubious concept when the controllers are on a fluctuating and secret payroll which must be countersigned each week by the professional staff.

Neither to the planning council nor to the subsequent governing board, prior to spring 1968, did McCoy present a detailed budget. As the first Ford grants had been made via Father Powis' church, however, he had no need to account for his expenditures to any outside authority. A third Ford grant in spring 1968 came via the Institute of Community Studies of Queens College, and payments were resumed to some of the parent representatives. The change of agency reformed the accounting procedure: the board members went on a real payroll, with deductions for taxes and Social Security.

The Planning Council Becomes a Governing Board and Hires Principals

After four weeks of day-and-night work, the planning council on July 29, 1967, produced a three-page proposal which took off from a revolutionary preamble ("Men are capable of putting an end to what they find intolerable

without recourse to politics. . . . The ending of oppression and the beginning of a new day has often become a reality only after people have resorted to violent means. . . . The following plan . . . is acknowledged to be the last threads of the community's faith in the school system's purposes and abilities"). The plan itself called for the creation of a governing board of twenty-four—one parent and one teacher from each of eight schools, five community representatives to be chosen by the parent members of the board, two representatives of the school supervisors in the district, and one delegate from a university to be chosen by the board as a whole. This board would exercise most of the powers of the Board of Education in the Ocean Hill schools, but in specifying the functions of the board, the proposal limited its personnel authority to the selection of a unit administrator, the approval of his recommendations for principal, and "policy for the guidance of the Unit Administrator in areas of . . . professional personnel." The board was also to have the right to seek out extra money from federal, state and private sources, but there was no mention of using such money to create MES schools.

Before the Board of Education could react in any way to this document, the planning council held the election for parent representatives. After some house-to-house canvassing to register voters (the Board had not supplied lists of parents), the council advertised the election for August 3 and set up ballot boxes in the schools. Turnout was light, and for the next two days delegates from the council, including the candidates, circulated around the district collecting votes door-to-door. In total, about a quarter of the district's parents voted. The next summer Assemblyman Samuel D. Wright, who represents the district in Albany and was the chairman of the original planning group, was to challenge this election as fraudulent, with editorial support from the *Amsterdam*

News, the city's largest-selling Negro newspaper. But an Advisory and Evaluation Committee on Decentralization, chaired by John H. Niemeyer of the Bank Street College of Education, reported back to the Board of Education that the election, while "unorthodox," was "one in which an honest effort was made to obtain the votes of all parents of the schools. . . . There was no evidence of coercion during the nominating process or during the election period itself." In fact—it is one of the lesser oddities of this story, but at one crucial moment it was to provide a decisive argument—the Board of Education never formally recognized this election or its results, though it has appointed all but one of the governing board's choices for principals and has even suspended the board without recognizing its election in the first place.

The elected parent representatives, all mothers and most on welfare, promptly co-opted five community leaders, including Father Powis, Assemblyman Wright, and Rev. C. Herbert Oliver, recently arrived from the South and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to become pastor of Westminster Bethany Presbyterian Church. Rev. Oliver, a handsome figure with a resonant voice, whose black-separatist beliefs were not yet known, was a neutral in the politics of the area. He was chosen chairman over Assemblyman Wright by a vote of 10–6, and the newly formed board got to work on personnel selection.

Four of the seven principalships were vacant in the district, and a fifth vacancy would be created in February with the opening of I-55, a new "intermediate school" (a term which replaces the old "junior high school" in the new "4-4-4" organization of school grades). In their proposals, the planning council had insisted on the right to choose any principals who met New York State requirements for such a job, without reference to the city school system's civil service list.

For elementary school principals, the city list is "competitive" —that is, the candidates for vacant principalships are ranked according to their score on an examination, and for each vacancy the Board of Education is required by law to take one of the three top names on the list. There are usually more names on a list than there will be vacancies before the next exam is given and the old list expires, so there is always great pressure from those toward the tail of a list to make sure that no position is left empty or occupied by an unlicensed person.

The Board of Education in August 1967 applied to State Commissioner of Education James E. Allen for permission to hire principals in Ocean Hill without reference to the usual list. Allen said no, but ruled the Board could *create* a special category of "Demonstration Elementary School Principal" which could be filled ad lib pending the development of a new exam to license people for such a position. It is this creation of a special category, and removal of the Ocean Hill jobs from the future prospects of those on the normal list, that a trial court and the Appellate Division ruled illegal, influencing the course of the teachers' strikes. In mid-January, 1969, fortunately, the state's highest court upheld the specific Ocean Hill appointments, as part of an experiment. For the city as a whole, there are still several hundred names on the current elementary principals list, only four of them are Negro, and the list does not expire until March 17, 1972.

The Ocean Hill board met on Thursday, August 31, and on McCoy's nomination recommended to the Board of Education five men to fill the district's vacancies—among them, Irving Gerber, a recently licensed principal who wished to transfer into the district; Louis Fuentes, a reading consultant from Farmingdale; William Harris, a city assistant principal; and Herman Ferguson—for appointment to I-55 when it

opened in February. The teacher representatives felt that they did not know any of these people (except Ferguson, to whom they objected), and when they had been chosen for the planning council in June, their colleagues had never expected them to be voting on principals for the schools. The teachers announced they would abstain from the vote on the principals, and left the room during the discussion. While they did not (as some reports have had it) "bolt" the meeting—they came back after the voting on principals was finished—it is clear that their action in abstaining and leaving the room was considered a rejection of the principals by some parent and community members of the governing board.

The attempt to appoint Ferguson was gratuitously insulting to the teachers, the grand jury that had indicted him, and the city at large, but it is hard to see how the other appointments could have been avoided by any responsible board. School was to open the next week, the schools needed principals, and the Board of Education had tentatively approved the special Demonstration Principal category. Incidentally, it should be said that all but one of the principals appointed by the governing board then and later are highly regarded by both the union and by school headquarters. (The exception is Louis Fuentes, who is regarded as emotionally unstable by officials of the bureau of personnel at the Board of Education, and by the members of the local school board for District 1, whom he and his friends held physically captive for some hours one evening in September to force them to name him district superintendent.) There is an Alice in Wonderland quality about the fact that the UFT in its third strike held out for the removal of P-144 principal Ralph Rogers, who is universally admired, and of William Harris, whose sense of fairness several UFT members in the district have special reason to cherish.

The Teachers Strike the City for Their Own Reasons, and Ocean Hill Hates Them for It

Before anybody could explain to anybody else what had happened at the August 31 meeting, the teachers went out on strike against the whole city. The origins of this 1967 strike lay in a standard money dispute with the Board of Education, but its proximate cause was technical—to force Mayor John V. Lindsay to bargain with the union. The Mayor had used the teacher negotiations to try out a new technique for labor-management relations in public service—a fact-finding board which would bring in a recommendation that the Mayor would publicly announce and then impose equally upon the department of government involved and the union representing its employees. This approach, whatever its virtues, was defective in that it left the union no function. If all goodies were to come by award from the Mayor's panels, and the decisions of these panels were to be beyond negotiation, then why should public employees pay dues to a union, which couldn't do anything for them anyway? The award the fact-finders had brought to Gracie Mansion was extremely generous, and the union could not seriously have fought for more money without looking greedy. To bring Mayor Lindsay to the bargaining table, then, the union proclaimed a strike mostly for smaller class sizes, additional MES schools, etc.: "TEACHERS WANT WHAT CHILDREN NEED."

Ocean Hill parents thought that what children needed was an open school and (those who knew about it) a shiny new governing board; and the strike was an abomination. (Some also resented a union demand that teachers have the right to exclude "disruptive children" from their classrooms without waiting for the principal to decide how much trouble such an action might cause him; this issue could be, and was, pre-

sented as racist, and in part, no doubt, it is—but the question is not simple.) The union asked the governing board to support the strike and keep the schools closed. There is some dispute as to whether or not the union offered a *quid pro quo* in terms of subsequent political support of the project—Rev. Oliver has said that it did, and union president Albert Shanker has said that it did not, that support for the strike was claimed on the basis of the planning council's agreement in the spring to push for More Effective Schools. In any event, the governing board angrily refused.

In retrospect, it seems obvious—indeed, it seemed obvious at the time—that, whatever the merits of the city-wide strike, a decent sensitivity to the newly aroused hopes of the people in the three demonstration districts should have permitted the union teachers to stay on the job in Ocean Hill.

Nowhere in the city were more ardent efforts made to keep the schools open through the strike. Letters were sent from Ocean Hill to the draft boards of male teachers, announcing that the teachers were no longer teaching and should be called up. Traveling militants were brought into the schools to take classes and to scare the teachers on the picket lines. (Ferguson himself ran the training lessons for parents who were going to take over classrooms.) Curses and obscenities were screamed at the pickets from all directions, and some were jostled. When the strike ended, after two wretched weeks, many union teachers did not wish to return to Ocean Hill at all. A special meeting was held in a ballroom of the Americana Hotel, where Shanker and Sandra Feldman, who had continued to hold the union's brief on Ocean Hill, urged the teachers to go back to their schools and give the demonstration project a chance.

The union's other gestures in the weeks after the strike, however, were determinedly hostile. Because the new governing boards were beginning to claim the right to fire

teachers, and certainly to evaluate their performance, the UFT executive board voted to forbid union teachers to become members of such boards. And meanwhile the union joined with the Council of Supervisory Associations, the organization of the principals, assistant principals, bureau chiefs, etc., in their lawsuit to oust the new Ocean Hill principals as illegally appointed.

The impact of this lawsuit within the schools was greater than most commentators have realized. Three of the four new principals appointed that fall were beginners at their jobs, and inevitably insecure. This statement that the assistant principals and teachers did not regard the principals as legitimate or permanent damaged their ability to control what were at best difficult schools. It was easy to believe that anything unpleasant which happened in school had been organized by a subversive staff; and in some instances, probably, the belief was true. The district's teachers were placed in an almost equally difficult position, of course, in their relations with the principals. The UFT had not consulted the teachers in the district before joining in the CSA suit. Recently, Albert Shanker was asked why the union had taken this action, especially in the light of its long history of opposition to the principals' licensing exams (the union has always advocated the election of principals by teachers). Shanker said, "Pure pique."

In November the administrative structure of the Ocean Hill schools collapsed: eighteen assistant principals applied for transfer out. New APs (assistant principals) were transferred in from the Board of Education list; the right to nominate principals without city license was all the special authority over personnel the Board planned to give to Ocean Hill. The governing board would plead unheard a few months later that "The very best principal in the world can-

not operate a school with assistant principals who are not cooperating."

Frustration Overwhelms the District and Radicalizes Its Governing Board

Meanwhile, McCoy was having serious difficulties setting up his own office. His application for a telephone was delayed from mid-July to September 6, and until space in a new apartment house became available around the first of the year the Board could find no better headquarters for him than an unheated store front. McCoy was denied the privilege of giving his appointees instant tenure, which meant that people transferring into Ocean Hill from out-of-town schools were risking their future livelihoods. Two assistants who lacked New York City licenses were denied formal appointment for some months, though McCoy was able to pay them on the school system's lower per-diem consultant rate. (Ford grant money could not be used to pay people in operating positions.)

The Board of Education denied requests for lump-sum budget allocations for McCoy's office and for the schools, insisting, for example, that money allocated from the central office for library would have to be spent for books and could not be spent for teacher training. Partly to employ local people and partly to get some authority over spending, the governing board asked for the right to let its own contracts for maintenance of its mostly decrepit school buildings, and was refused. Some of these powers the Board of Education probably could not have delegated legally, and some (considering what was being done with the Ford money) it was probably wise to refuse. But Board member Lloyd Garrison, for one, thought that insufficient effort was put into searching the statutes to see what, if anything, could be done to in-

crease the authority of the demonstration district governing boards.

The new semester in February 1968 brought fresh problems and promises. The new I-55 was opened with gleeful ceremony, and the old J-178 was converted to an elementary school, ending overcrowding in the district. Ferguson was still unacceptable to the Board of Education, and the governing board appointed Percy Jenkins acting principal of I-55. An experienced principal of Chinese background, Daniel Lee, was brought in from Nassau County for the converted P-178, and a principal of Italian origin was appointed to P-73. Jack Bloomfield of J-271, whose relations in the district had disintegrated after his nomination to be unit administrator, had finally been granted his transfer out. McCoy wanted to shift William Harris to J-271 from the now defunct J-178 because J-271 was his worst problem and he considered Harris his best man (so did the J-178 teachers, nearly all of whom signed a petition asking the governing board to allow Harris to move with them to I-55). The Board of Education would not make the appointment, however, and finally McCoy in desperation simply "recognized" Harris as principal of J-271. (The Board had a reason for its reluctance, by the way—Allen had authorized *elementary* school, not junior high school, demonstration principals.) Now only one pre-governing board principal was left in the district.

Harris, the first male Negro principal of a secondary school in New York, came into an unbelievably chaotic situation. Thirty teachers—a quarter of the staff—had transferred out, and the Board of Education had found only sixteen replacements. Five of the six secretaries had left; all the assistant principals were new; and forty sets of keys were missing. Absenteeism ran from ten to twenty-five teachers a day; often there were simply not enough adult bodies in the building to man the classrooms for seventeen hundred children, let alone

to chase the kids out of the halls. Fires broke out mysteriously, several every week, and the culprits could not be found. Furniture was thrown from third-floor windows, paint flew around art rooms, vandalism and thievery were everywhere. Harris met grimly with his staff, and they decided they would try to make it work. Somehow.

In early March, Justice Dominic S. Rinaldi of Kings County Supreme Court handed down an opinion that the appointment of Demonstration Elementary School Principals in Ocean Hill was illegal under Subdivision 10 of Section 2573 of the Education Law. The next day Frederick Nauman, a guidance teacher who was UFT chapter chairman for J-271 and district chairman for the unit, drafted a letter to Alfred A. Giardino, president of the Board of Education, urging him to appeal the decision and to retain the governing board's principals on the job pending the results of the last possible appeal, because the Ocean Hill experiment was important and would be killed if the principals were removed. Nauman secured 115 signatures, virtually the entire staff, and sent the letter off. Giardino received and acknowledged it with the comment that the Board was proceeding along the lines Nauman and the J-271 staff desired.

When I arrived at Ocean Hill that month to write an article, I found McCoy working desperately hard with his principals and staff—some white, some Negro—to put a head of steam under a number of new programs in reading, math, Negro and Puerto Rican culture, bilingualism, etc. He had begun small-scale training programs for "paraprofessionals," mothers of children in the district's schools who would at the end of the programs become teacher assistants, helping out with reading and math. He was planning for teacher teams, nongraded classrooms, programed instruction—everything in the way of educational innovation that might help in a neighborhood where most children were as far behind as

they were in Ocean Hill. I visited four of the district's schools on as many days, and returned to tell McCoy that I had seen a good deal of routine and some substandard teaching, and that the schools seemed dominated by a fear of disorder which impeded teaching. He said he knew, that he was working to establish a climate in which teachers could teach, and that once he had the climate he was going to judge who was good and could give help, who needed help, and who ought to be eliminated from the district. It was all intelligent, level-headed and very sad.

During April, 1968, the district sustained three serious shocks. One was the murder of Martin Luther King and consequent assaults on white teachers at J-271, some of which may have been stimulated by an inflammatory notice about the assassination posted on bulletin boards by Leslie Campbell, publicity director of the African-American Teachers Association, who had recently transferred into the district. Another was a two-day school boycott called by the governing board and almost entirely effective, to support the governing board's demand for recognition and for authority over budget and personnel. The third was a fire one afternoon at I-55, which drove everyone out of the building a little after two o'clock. At three the firemen were still there, and the children were still on the street. A few teachers—there is a dispute about how many, but ten would seem to be a maximum figure—simply abandoned their classes and went off home, or to their second jobs, or whatever. When the children poured back into the building, coats and other possessions were stolen, fights broke out, and the new school, which had opened three months before as the future pride of the community, became the scene of a minor riot.

At about this time, perhaps because of the general level of frustration, perhaps because of these specific events, perhaps

because the Ford grant had run out and the parent representatives were no longer being paid—perhaps because it had been planned that way from the beginning—the Ocean Hill board fell under the domination of people who had determined to use it to "force a confrontation with a sick society."